



Chesapeake Bay Program

# ADOPTION STATEMENT

## STRATEGY FOR INCREASING BASIN-WIDE PUBLIC ACCESS TO CHESAPEAKE BAY INFORMATION

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e, the undersigned members of the Chesapeake Executive Council, adopt the Chesapeake Bay Program's *Strategy for Increasing Basin-wide Public Access to Chesapeake Bay Information*. This Strategy provides for systems which promote increased electronic access to Chesapeake Bay information by the general public as well as various sectors of the Bay Program community. It enables more efficient delivery of governmental services throughout the watershed as well as enhanced opportunity for the public to engage in Bay policy development and to more fully understand the activities of the restoration program and how individuals and organizations can contribute.



**T**his Strategy contributes to the fulfillment of the following goals and objectives of the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement to:

- maintain a coordinated Chesapeake Bay data management system;
- provide timely information on the progress of the restoration program; and

- promote greater understanding among citizens about the Chesapeake Bay system, the problems facing it, policies and programs designed to help it, and to foster individual responsibility and stewardship of the Bay's resources.

Date OCTOBER 10, 1996

## CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



*Carol M. Brown*

FOR THE STATE OF MARYLAND



*Pam N. Glendon*

FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA



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FOR THE CHESAPEAKE BAY COMMISSION



*Jack W. Weinger*

# STRATEGY FOR INCREASING BASIN-WIDE PUBLIC ACCESS TO CHESAPEAKE BAY INFORMATION

## INTRODUCTION

The Chesapeake Bay Program is founded on the commitment of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the District of Columbia, the Federal Government and the Chesapeake Bay Commission to work in partnership to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay system. In the years since the Chesapeake Bay Agreement of 1983, the Program has expanded its scope of partnerships to include greater participation by citizens, local governments, businesses and others. The Program has also expanded its geographic and technical scope by encompassing more activities in the watershed, the airshed and even the influence of the ocean in recognition of the extensive ecosystem connections that affect the Bay and its management.

These expansions in scope have challenged the Bay Program both to integrate a growing base of technical information and to provide a growing circle of partners, including the public, access to a broad array of information. There is little doubt that the future success of the Bay Program depends upon effectively meeting these growing information needs. At the same time that these needs have emerged, information technology has undergone a revolution, presenting the Bay Program with a unique and timely opportunity to utilize these new technologies.

## RECOGNIZING THE NEED

Over the past nine months, the Chesapeake Bay Program has completed a series of steps to determine the priority needs of users of Bay information. Our analysis, which included the findings listed below, led us to recognize the critical importance of developing a Strategy for Increasing Basin-Wide Public Access to Chesapeake Bay Information:

- We adopted a goal in the 1987 Chesapeake Bay Agreement to "support and enhance the present comprehensive, cooperative and coordinated approach toward management of the Chesapeake Bay system" which included an objective to "develop and maintain a coordinated Chesapeake Bay data management system."
- We also adopted a goal in that Agreement to "promote greater understanding among citizens about the Chesapeake Bay system, the problems facing it and policies and programs designed to help it, and to foster individual responsibility and stewardship of the Bay's resources."
- In the Section on Public Information, Education and Participation, we committed to "provide timely information on the progress of the restoration program" and to "coordinate the production and distribution of Bay information and education materials."
- The public demand for all kinds of Chesapeake Bay information is very high and continues to grow as indicated by verbal and written requests for scientific data, program publications, Internet Home Page contacts, and other contacts to the Bay Program.
- Through initiatives such as the Tributary Strategy Implementation, Local Government Partnership, and others, the Bay Program moves continually "upstream" and closer to individuals who can make a difference in the restoration.
- Involvement of these individuals can be aided significantly by ready access to information about human impacts on the ecological system and the measures that individuals can take to protect the Bay.
- Computers and electronic communications technology have undergone dramatic changes in the past few years which now enable world-wide access to information very cost efficiently through the Internet and World Wide Web, and the capability exists to greatly enhance the speed of access and the breadth of information available.
- The Bay Program seeks to stay abreast of these developments to meet the needs of the public and the Bay Agreement commitments noted above.
- Many Bay Program participant organizations are independently developing data bases and Internet Home Pages for Chesapeake Bay related information, and significant cost savings can be derived and greater services offered through the cooperative development of systems that serve both individual agency needs and the need to share

information about the Bay and its restoration by the various partners in this effort.

- The Chesapeake Executive Council sees a major opportunity through coordinated approaches among the signatories and others to enhance the public's access to information and to streamline Bay policy development that encourages stakeholder input.

## STRATEGY

Recognizing the needs noted above and the tremendous opportunities afforded the program and the public, the Chesapeake Bay Program has developed the following *Strategy for Increasing Basin-Wide Public Access to Chesapeake Bay Information*:

**System Development**—The development of a basin-wide Chesapeake Information Management System (CIMS) that will provide the general public and specialty users with timely information and scientific data of all sorts on the condition of the Bay and the progress of the restoration program should proceed. Such a system should be developed on a pace commensurate with existing resources of the Bay Program and its partners but begin its operation in 1996, using the concepts reviewed at the June, 1996 CIMS Workshop, and outlined below, with enhancements to be incorporated over time. It should be designed in a way to serve the needs of the general public and to afford opportunities for Bay Program participants and stakeholder groups to conduct business and share policy and technical information in an efficient manner through electronic means.

**Internet Access**—The system should be established as a coordinated user-friendly system using the latest technology for Internet and World Wide Web access and be designed as a distributed network among participating organizations throughout the watershed and nationwide.

**Standards**—Through the existing Chesapeake Bay Program committee structure, develop minimum standards and protocols that will facilitate access to information and data across agency and jurisdictional boundaries, using to the extent possible, those standards already developed or in use.

**Partnerships**—The Chesapeake Bay Program's Implementation Committee should initiate efforts to enter into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with participating federal, state, regional and local organizations and individuals for the maintenance of key information for public access. Partners in this effort should not be limited to those working as current members of the Bay Program but be open to any cooperating organization willing to meet the system parameters and requirements. The MOA should provide for common data standards and data documentation which are universally applied and serve to ensure that users receive information of known quality. It shall also describe the long-term roles and responsibilities of various organizations and information generators to maintain distributed computer networks and data bases.

**Procurement Conditions**—As a routine matter, all Chesapeake Bay Program and other participating organizations should ensure that work procured under grants, contracts or subagreements be conditioned, to the extent possible, on the submission of information products and raw data in an electronic format for easy loading to this network and/or are provided and maintained directly on the network.

**Progress Reports and User Feedback**—Reports of progress should be prepared and presented to the Implementation Committee and Principals' Staff Committee by the Data Center Workgroup and Communications Subcommittee no less than annually. These would include progress in system development and supplying useful information to the public, in securing partners in this effort, and any significant impediments to the effort. An on-going mechanism for public feedback to the Bay Program shall be incorporated into the design of the system so that users may routinely advise the program of the utility of this network and their highest priority information needs.